



# NEWS



COMMISSION ON GRADUATES OF FOREIGN NURSING SCHOOLS  
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONS

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**For Immediate Release**

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**Alabama Board of Nursing**

**Homeland Security Extends Deadline For Screening  
Of Certain Foreign Healthcare Workers In U.S.;  
CGFNS Says Delay Offers Responsible And Targeted Relief**

**Philadelphia, PA – July 20, 2004** – The Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) welcomed the decision yesterday by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to extend the deadline for Mexican and Canadian healthcare workers to obtain a special visa certification to deliver patient care and services in the U.S. The new deadline will be July 26, 2005. The extension will apply only to Mexican and Canadian citizens who were licensed and employed before September 23, 2003, in the U.S. in one of seven specific healthcare occupations, including nursing, and who previously were exempt under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These Trade NAFTA (TN) healthcare workers would have been required for the first time to obtain the special visa certification if they had sought to enter the U.S. after July 26, 2004. The DHS rules are intended to ensure that foreign healthcare workers meet the professional training and standards necessary to provide patient care in U.S. hospitals and clinical facilities.

The Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools, a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was designated by the U.S. Congress in 1996 to manage a healthcare worker visa certification program. CGFNS established a *VisaScreen™* program to assess credentials of foreign healthcare workers and provide the government-required visa certificate mandated by the DHS rules.

"The DHS decision to grant an extension for foreign healthcare professionals with Trade NAFTA status is consistent with the suggestion we made last February to Secretary Tom Ridge," said CGFNS CEO Barbara L. Nichols. "This decision will prove helpful for many communities, especially those bordering Canada, that rely on Canadian nurses and other healthcare professionals to meet their communities' healthcare needs. Although the government has provided enough time for the TN workers to meet the July, 2004 deadline, this delay offers responsible and targeted relief for many communities and will provide more time for hospitals and other facilities in affected areas to facilitate the screening process."

"We stand ready to work cooperatively with the DHS and healthcare professionals worldwide to facilitate the screening process," Nichols continued. "Healthcare consumers and professionals, alike, can take comfort in knowing that CGFNS has built an efficient tested infrastructure that has enabled us to process more than 49,000 applications for our *VisaScreen™* certificate, assess the qualifications of foreign healthcare professionals to work in the U.S., and protect the public interest."

CGFNS was founded in 1977 at the encouragement of several government agencies and nursing organizations. In addition to its *VisaScreen™* program, CGFNS provides leadership in healthcare education, registration, and licensure to the global nursing and healthcare community. Throughout its history, CGFNS has demonstrated its commitment to excellence and quality in the healthcare arena and to fostering equitable treatment of healthcare professionals.

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